

Residential Automobile and Boat Washing

Automobile washing is one of the most common residential activities that contributes pollutants to surface water, streams, creeks, lakes and Puget Sound. Wash water carries oil, grease, solvents, nutrients, heavy metals, and suspended solids to our local water bodies. Soaps and detergents that we use to wash automobiles are more of a pollution threat than the grime washed off the automobiles. Soaps that are labeled biodegradable or non-toxic are very often toxic to aquatic organisms and other wildlife. The “non-toxic” label simply means the soap is not toxic to the user.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

The following BMPs, or equivalent measures, methods or practices are required if you engage in automobile or boat washing at your home.

1

It is allowable to rinse down the body of a vehicle/boat with just water without doing any wash water BMPs.

2

If you wash your automobile or boat using mild detergents on an area that allows for infiltration of the wash water, such as gravel, grass, or loose soil, it is acceptable to let the wash water infiltrate as long as you only wash the body of the vehicle.





3

However, if you wash on a paved area such as your driveway and use soaps or other cleansers you must do ONE of the following:

- Re-Direct the wash water to vegetated areas such as landscaping or your lawn. This can be accomplished by using temporary measures such as a berm, boom/socks or other solid materials like a piece of lumber placed at the low point of where your vehicle is parked. This will direct the flow of water to your lawn or landscaping.
- Use a wet vacuum to collect the wash water and then dispose of the wash water to your sink or toilet for treatment at your local sewage

treatment plant.

OTHER OPTIONS AND TIPS

-  1 Take your vehicle to a commercial car wash where wash water is recycled and discharged to the sanitary sewer. This also reduces the amount of water used for vehicle washing.
-  2 Use a high pressure hose nozzle with a trigger, shut it off when you're not using it, to minimize water usage.
-  3 Never clean or pressure wash the engine or undercarriage of your automobile at home. The oil, grease and other pollutants from this activity can pollute your property, and groundwater or shallow aquifers. This is especially important in areas where wells provide potable water. For this type of cleaning, take the vehicle to a commercial car wash, where wash water will be treated appropriately.
-  4 There are some products on the market that use no water to wash your vehicle.

For more information or assistance in implementing these best management practices, contact the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks Stormwater Services Section at 206-296-1900.